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# Territorial strategies of South African informal dwellers

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# Territorial strategies of South African informal dwellers

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## **Introduction**

Dramatic land invasion in Kempton Park, Johannesburg, in July 2001 has once again attracted international attention to the plight of land-hungry Black South Africans. The squatters held up placards in front of the removers and addressed Minister of Safety and Security Steve Tshwete in no uncertain terms: “Steve: have you got a nice big bedroom? All we want is a piece of ground the size of your kitchen. How many cars sleep in your garage? We don’t want land that belong to others, there is enough land in this country for everyone. Please tell us Steve, how long must we wait?” (Mail and Guardian, 13/7/2001).

Political parties used this opportunity for their own particular political agendas: the Pan-Africanist Congress supported the invasion; the Democratic Alliance gave the squatters opportunistic material assistance. Moreover, the Kempton Park incident shed light on the

situation of squatters in South African cities. As is the case elsewhere in developing countries, the rapid growth of the metropolis has created a huge housing problem, partly solved by illegal occupancy – under harsh living conditions - of urban land. In South Africa, the apartheid regime and its legacies worsened the problem by:

- 1) Enforcing a stringent control on African mobility to the cities and thus creating ‘illegal’ migrations;
- 2) Restricting land ownership, especially in urban areas;
- 3) Restricting African residency in urban areas to certain, delimited neighbourhoods, the *townships*, where accommodation was only to be found in low quality houses provided by the authorities. Reluctant to spend too much money on housing for the African population, the authorities never delivered enough accommodation for the African urban population. In some cases, e.g. in Cape Town, building of accommodation for Africans even stopped for decades, generating overcrowding in the existing townships as well as squatting on the Cape Flats. (Fast, 1995)
- 4) As a logical consequence of apartheid policies limiting the presence of Africans in cities, the official reaction towards squatters was brutal eviction. No alternative accommodation was offered and removals took place even to remote homelands. (Cole, 1986; Silk, 1981).

The last years of the apartheid regime saw a rapid growth of informal settlements in and around big cities from the second half of the 1980s (e.g. Crankshaw and Hart, 1990). At first, it was seen as a consequence of the 1986 repeal of influx control legislation: informal dwellers were then understood as new migrants, directly arriving from the countryside, especially from the homelands. Life in the settlements was also described as semi-traditional and semi-rural, thus providing an interstitial space where migrants could adapt to urban ways. Detailed field studies proved that this interpretation was not correct (Guillaume, 1999; Sapire

and Schlemmer, 1990) and offered an alternative, more complex, view of the situation: many squatters were in fact long-term residents of the agglomeration and had decided to resort to squatting as they felt it offered a 'suitable' alternative to their former residence and way of life. It was therefore a 'choice', obviously in a very limited set of options - mainly due to lack of financial resources. We will show that this choice took place in a holistic strategy to get access to urban and personal opportunities. Squatting was seen as a mean to attain personal independence and to gain access to private space, as opposed to the overcrowding of the surrounding townships. As these townships are usually located far from the city centre, squatting allows people to settle in places with better location: building a shack in centrally located areas gives easier access to urban resources (whether jobs or less legal sources of income). Whereas the informal dwellers may be poor and marginalized by the urban society, they are nevertheless able to make choices, to develop specific strategies and have a significant impact on the shape and life of their city. Since these choices are made by individuals, they are diverse and the squatters, as well as the informal settlements, should not be seen as an homogeneous group. Different people happen to settle in different places, for various reasons, thus creating different landscapes. Our findings match here with a strong current in social sciences: the view from 'below' rehabilitates the role of the poor in the construction of the city, the creation of its landscapes and its economy by fostering active strategies, whether through their choice of residence or of occupation.

Understanding the territorial strategies of the informal dwellers is an important challenge: according to the 1999 October Household Survey, 59% of African-headed households in urban areas were living in formal dwellings while 25% were living in shacks, 10% in backyard rooms and 4% in other accommodation such as a tent or caravan. The last 1% was living in traditional dwellings. Almost 40% of African-headed households in South African

cities were housed in unsuitable dwellings (October Household Survey, 1999). Meeting the housing needs of these citizens is one of the most urgent tasks of the democratically elected government. What is more: as revealed in the Kempton Park placard, housing (or lack thereof) and the tenure of land are a key criteria in understanding new fractures in the post-apartheid South African society.

Before we go into further analysis of the territorial strategies of informal dwellers, we must make some methodological remarks:

1. The data used in this paper comes from the existing literature (see reference list) and from our own field studies: in the Johannesburg area, in the Thembalihle, Kliptown (Soweto), Newtown and Power Station squatter camps (city centre), during the years 1995 to 1997; in the Cape Town area, in the settlements of Lower Crossroads, Khayelitsha and Mfuleni during the years 1996 and 1997. We have conducted in-depth interviews with randomly chosen residents and we have collected life histories.
2. The large scope of our data allows us to offer a generalised analysis of the territorial strategies of the informal dwellers. Comparing different settlements, in different cities is however a difficult task, and requires careful analysis. We are very much aware of the methodological difficulties of such a broad analysis. We must acknowledge that local contexts and policies have constructed strong differences. The official prohibition of squatting was enforced even more ruthlessly in Cape Town, for example, and this prohibition lasted and well into the 1980s. Building of accommodation for Africans was interrupted for many years, enormously increasing the housing backlog: people had no access to legal accommodation since vacant housing was non-existent; they could not resort to squatting without being evicted.

3. The internationally-used concept of 'informal' settlements covers many different realities.

While the exploration of these differences is one of our subjects here, let us state that a clear distinction needs to be made between informal tenure and informal housing. Informal tenure includes non-western, traditional occupancy of the land, as well as squatting (i.e. occupation of a piece of land without its owner's consent). Informal housing can be found on squatted land but also in backyard shacks in townships or in site-and-service schemes. Harsh living conditions linked with informal housing (vulnerability to wind, rain and fire, problematic access to water, electricity and sewer, etc.) are not only the squatters' lot.

### **Squatting and the city: a socio-spatial approach**

#### *La`dscapes of i`formality, la`dscapes of poverty*

A first glance at informal settlements will present the homogeneity of the landscapes it produces: the lack of financial resources leads the residents to use recycled material for their shacks. Asbestos, wood, plastic and stones make up for shelter.

Widespread poverty among the residents can be clearly seen in the private space: the shacks are generally poorly equipped and sparsely furnished (Houssay-Holzschuch, 1999). Their internal organisation is designed along rationalised lines to optimise the use of the little available space. The few rooms can generally boast only a few mattresses, clothes hanging on walls covered with recycled wrapping paper: Campbell soups, Cadbury's or Liebig, emblems of a consumer society, ornate the walls of the very poor. In a corner, pots and pans indicate the kitchen. Cooking takes place either on a paraffin stove or, if the informal settlement has

been provided with electricity as part of a regularisation process, one electric plate. An old couch, the pride of the family, makes room for parents and visitors.

Inside the shack, a semi-public, semi-private space is thus defined: it is a space for social relations, for reception and representation. This 'social space' is used to enhance the resident's prestige, to offer people an ideal representation of him/herself and to publicly display his/her values. It has at first a strongly Western flavour: the home ideal of many informal dwellers is the common representation of a modern, Western, middle-class interior. The 'riches' or material possessions of the dweller are displayed: TV or music player if any, bibelots on the coffee-table, crockery in a glassed dresser. Even the poorest among informal dwellers tend to reconstitute this environment, e.g. with second-hand furniture. It is kept immaculate and receives many people. A high frequency of visits is seen as socially and culturally desirable and is made possible by the high unemployment rate. The walls around the couch are further decorated by photographs showing formally dressed, graduating children: education is here both internally recognised and socially displayed as an important source of prestige and the only way to social upliftment. This inside organisation and decoration of the shack can be found in the vast majority of informal settlements in South African cities. It is also similar to the ones existing in formal African townships (Houssay-Holzschuch, 1999).

This homogeneity of private space organisation is mirrored by similarities in the public space across various settlements. As their 'informal' status would suggest, they are ill-equipped: water, electricity, sewer, roads are lacking more often than not. Public amenities such as schools or clinics are absent. Residents try to tackle their own needs either by providing informal services (such as commerce, crèches, etc.) or by organising and lobbying for *i` situ*



upgrading. They have often attained some success and this creates a first differentiation between settlements: some have been 'regularised' (their existence and their occupation of a specific piece of land has been juridically recognised) and have been delivered with communal taps and toilets; others are still battling or are simply too recent.

These arrangements of both internal, private space and public space in informal settlements give us some leads to understand the socio-spatial processes of place-making and settlement-making for informal dwellers:

1. Most evidently, poverty characterises the squatters' space.
2. Relatively homogeneous design appears, by contrast to the variation in external landscapes shown by a careful analysis (see next paragraph). Not surprisingly, this design tries to answer simultaneously the need for a shelter and the need for a home: for instance, thermal insulation and decoration are both provided by the recycled wrapping papers on the walls.
3. Social values, relations and networks pervades this internal space and transform it into place. Similarly, we will show that settlement-making (i.e. localisation, produced landscape, economic and land profile...) also follows both different networks of sociability and the squatter's expectations and values in terms of family life, quality of life, etc.

The poor are here building their own city, trying to put their individual and collective mark on an area to locally transform a space imposed by poverty into an appropriated place reflecting their own values.

### *Differe` t stories, differe` t spaces*

While this is the general picture that can be found throughout South African cities, informal settlements each have their specificity, linked to their particular history. The seven specific

cases that follow (four of them in the Johannesburg area, the other three in Cape Town) give an insight into different dynamics.

- Thembalihle and Mfuleni

The informal settlement of Thembalihle (Good Hope in Zulu) has been built on an open space in Lenasia, an Indian township located 30 km southwest of Johannesburg. The first residents of Thembalihle arrived in 1986, settled on land belonging to the then PWV Region and the squatter camp grew to 6,000 residents in 1990 and 28,000 in 1996 (Guillaume, 2001:41). The first residents organised themselves into a civic association with the proclaimed objective of organising and controlling the space of the settlement. Each newcomer was assigned a 250 m<sup>2</sup> plot on which he could build his/her shack. Today, the 5,800 shacks of the settlement do not have access to water or to electricity, even though the Lenasia power lines pass directly above the settlement. Since the 1995 local elections, the new Thembalihle's mayor has been trying to improve the living conditions in the settlement: public toilets, garbage containers, and caravans offering police or health services have been placed at the settlement's entry. The general landscape in Thembalihle is made of large, green plots where shacks or houses are build (20% of the shacks are consolidated, or are in the process of being consolidated into permanent structures). The grid-iron plan and large streets planned by the civic association add to the calm and order of the place. This *la`dscape* resembles many popular neighbourhoods in French-speaking Africa, even if the economic profile of Thembalihle is much more strictly urban: cities of various sizes and status, such as Abidjan (Antoine *et al.*, 1987), Lomé (Gervais-Lambony, 1994), Kinshasa (Pain, 1984), Toliara (Houssay-Holzschuch, 1994), etc. have been described by scholars as retaining a "rural" character, especially in their peripheral landscape. There, relatively large plots house the extended family; they are often planted with trees and allow some poultry or even cattle-raising.

Traditional networks are still at work. Nevertheless, all authors make clear that this rural character or *ruralité* is not at all incompatible with urban life, roots and values. Thus, whereas Thembalihle may well be an illegal settlement, it is nevertheless an organised and controlled space where residents lead a peaceful life by South African standards. The squatter camp in Mfuleni, an African township in the periphery of Cape Town, offers the same characteristics in terms of landscape: located at the very periphery of the City of Cape Town area, it is also a peaceful neighbourhood. There is only little competition for space, which allows residents to occupy large plots. The sandy soil of the Cape Flats has been planted with plants and greenery, flourishing with reasonable success. Some services and an important housing project were encouraging signs for the squatters' future in 1997.

#### - Lower Crossroads

Peripheral informal settlements do not always conform to the model exemplified by the Thembalihle case. The Lower Crossroads settlement of the Cape Flats is far from the city centre and is situated in a low-density area. Nevertheless, the settlement itself is very densely populated. As from 1986, its residents chose to live here as a refuge against the violence in Crossroads (Cole, 1986). They were mainly supporters of the controversial leader Nxobongwana and followed his political (mis)fortune. Established in a context of urgency and violence, the settlement has not been planned and its sandy soil does not allow easy gardening or waste and garbage disposal. The basic facilities have taken a long time to arrive, even if they now compare to those of Thembalihle.

#### - Kliptown and Nyanga :

Kliptown, one of the oldest neighbourhoods of Soweto, offers a landscape in striking contrast to that of Thembalihle. The informal settlement has occupied the interstitial, vacant spaces of

an historic suburb; it was a racially mixed neighbourhood at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was later proclaimed African. Many buildings and the commercial centre are relics of Kliptown's past. The density of services and shops, reaching a level seldom found in African townships, resemble East African urban areas: the bustling streets of Nairobi (Vennetier, 1991) or Kampala (Calas, 1998) offer a similar atmosphere and landscape. Indeed, the bungalow-style old houses, the arcades under which Indian-owned shops are located, the mixing of the formal and the informal (in terms of commerce, services or housing) strengthen this impression. In the early 1980s, Kliptown's residential component was 'informalised': lacking space, many residents or tenants of formal houses built shacks on the same plot or nearby. No general plan is apparent, as the shacks were built one after another to suit the Kliptownians' needs. Many shacks partly occupy public space, such as the street. A nearby vacant space has also been occupied in the second half of the 1980s. The landscape created by the 3,000 or so informal dwellers in Kliptown is characterised by a feeling of urban complexity if not lack of readable spatial organisation similar to the one encountered in the Nyanga township of Cape Town: squatters settled on any kind of vacant space, in between formal houses and hostels. The bustling informal market on the main road through Nyanga adds to the "urban" atmosphere (see further for specific developments on the concept of "urbanity").

#### - Newtown and Power Station

The Johannesburg city centre has also been a locality for squatters. Its informal settlements such as Newtown or Power Station are yet another type. Though they are much smaller (between 100 and 200 residents in Newtown in 1996, some 20 shacks in Power Station), they function as 'blot on the landscape', as defined by Dixon *et al.* (1997): they are surrounded by the modernist architecture of high-rise and prestigious buildings such as the de Beers

building. The Johannesburg Stock Exchange, the Market Theatre, museums or the French cultural and scientific centre IFAS (Institut Français d'Afrique du Sud) are also in the immediate proximity. Particularly dilapidated shacks were densely build in 1995 on a vacant space next to the Newtown taxi station, before being forcibly relocated in December 1996 to the peripheral site of Orange Farm (some 50 km south of Johannesburg). The inner city squatters were among the poorest of the poor, barely scratching together a living in the big city by any possible means, legal or not. Whereas they were in a very central location, they did not have access to any services: there were no toilets, no electricity and a standpipe at the taxi station was the only source of water. Newtown was a hopeless space, a last refuge for desperate people. Power Station, a disused industrial building nearby, also accommodated some fifty squatters: the walls and roof, though in bad shape, were sheltering a few makeshift shacks, hidden from the street. Their makeshift construction, enabled by the protection of the power station, show that the line between squatting and homelessness can be a very tenuous one.

### *Squatti`g a`d poverty*

As observed by some specialists of popular housing in Third World cities, “informal housing is the most visible dimension of poverty” (Gilbert and Gugler, 1992:114). Sapire and Schlemmer (1990) have shown that people living in squatter camps are, by far, in worse economic conditions than formal townships residents.

	Average monthly household income
Matchbox	900
Backyard shack	749

Squatter camp	449
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Table 1: Average monthly household income (in ZAR) in 1990, in relation to the housing structure. (Source: Sapiro & Schlemmer, 1990, p. 73).

Our 1996-1997 fieldwork in Gauteng has produced similar results. The average monthly household income amounted to R 744 in Thembalihle and to R 481 in Kliptown, but in both cases, the *per capita* income was only R 120. In 1995, some 40% of South African Black urban families were living below the poverty line, estimated at R 840 per month for an urban family of two adults and three kids (Republic of South Africa, 1994). Crankshaw and Hart (1990) also showed that poor qualification or employment characterised the Vlakfontein squatter population, compared to the situation in the townships: 51% of professionally active people were unqualified as opposed to ‘only’ 27% in surroundings townships. What is more, 68% of the Vlakfontein residents were working in the informal sector.

Unemployment is also widespread among informal dwellers as families dramatically experience the loss of a job: unable to pay for their former matchbox house or flat rent, they move to a more affordable form of shelter, usually in informal settlements. This was the case for the vast majority of the Johannesburg CBD squatters. In addition, people in Newtown or Power Station squatter camps had no family to turn to in difficult times. For them, squatting was the only option.

As elsewhere in the Third World, poor education, low qualification and skills, piece jobs and low wages are some obvious explanations for the presence of informal squatters camps in

South African cities. In most cases, squatters appear to be living “without any visible means of subsistence” (Koch, 1983:151).

However, other, very specific explanations for squatting can be drawn from the South African political context:

1. Political violence characterised the 1980-1990 decade. The conflict between hostel and township residents created no-go areas, e.g. in the East Rand areas of Thokoza, Vosloorus or Katlehong. Township residents living close to the hostels, and therefore on the front line of conflict, may have seen their homes destroyed. These families resorted to squatting.
2. The lack of available accommodation for urban Africans generated a very high population density in the “matchbox houses”, as the formal houses built under the apartheid regime are often designated by their residents. Many legal tenants generated an income from renting rooms or backyard shacks at relatively high rates: in 1997, an illegal tenant in a backyard shack could pay between R 40 and R 100 per month to the legal resident (who paid less in formal rent for the whole matchbox house). Arbitrary decisions from the landlord are common and concern the amount and increase of the rent as well as curfew hours at night, maximum number of people allowed to visit, or the restricted use of water, electricity or toilets. Moving to an informal settlement can then appear as a suitable alternative to a landlord’s whims: the rent would be reduced to zero, there might be no loss of comfort and the former tenant would gain independence. Even when the relations between tenant and landlord are good, the unwritten agreement between them is always at risk, as observed in our fieldwork: a family spent fourteen years subletting rooms in a Sowetan matchbox house, and feeling part of the household. When the legal tenant passed away, this family had no

legal right to further occupy the dwelling. The family had to move to an informal settlement.

3. In many cases, industrial or mine workers are housed by their employers. During the various economic crises that have affected the mining sector in the last decades, many workers that lost both their job and their accommodation found refuge in surrounding squatter camps.
4. We also came across a large number of people, aged fifty to sixty, that had been squatters in urban areas for their whole life. Because of apartheid legislation, such as the 1951 *Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act*, they had repeatedly experienced forceful removal, and their shacks had been destroyed many times. Lacking any alternative, they could only reproduce one residential strategy: build another shack somewhere else.

If poverty is indeed one of the first causes for squatting, it is not the only one. When asked what led them to their informal home, all the residents interviewed in the Johannesburg CBD squatter camps, without exception, said that they were in desperate need of a place to stay. In Kliptown, only 41% gave the same answer, while this figure dropped to 19% in Thembalihle. Thus, reasons to resort to squatting differ. Are they part of a more holistic personal, collective or territorial strategy?

#### *Movement to squatter settlements*

Squatters are not newcomers to the urban environment. In Kliptown and Thembalihle, we found that most squatters entered the Johannesburg area between 1971 and 1980. Other



studies, such as Sapire and Schlemmer (1990), confirm the squatters' relatively early arrival. We also found that the 1986 abolition of *I`flux Co`trol* legislation did not necessarily cause rural-urban migration into informal settlements.

	Johannesburg area	Kliptown camp
Before 1940	2	2
1941-1950	2	2
1951-1960	0	0
1961-1970	8	11
1971-1980	40	13
1981-1986	19	10
1986-1996	29	62
Total	100	100

Table 2: Respective dates of arrival in the Johannesburg area and in the Kliptown squatter camp (%). Source: own fieldwork, 1996.

	Thembalihle	Kliptown
Matchbox	62	50
Backyard shack	14	10
Squatter camp	6	10
Hostel	5	0
Homeland	6	21
Other	7	9
Total	100	100

No. of interviews	61	55
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Table 3: Previous type of housing of Thembalihle and Kliptown squatters (%). Source: own fieldwork, 1995-1996.

Once in the Johannesburg area, the urban poor move within the metropolis: they change places in order to access different urban opportunities. If we add together the number of people previously housed in matchbox houses and in backyard shacks, 76% of Thembalihle's people and 60% of Kliptown's people had been living in formal townships before resorting to squatting. Overcrowding, cost of living and lack of personal freedom were strong reasons for this move.

### **Squatter networks**

The landscape, localisation and socio-economic characteristics of the various informal settlements we have studied differ significantly. We suggest that different social networks and motivations have presided to their birth and development. Squatters, according to their means and needs, develop an adapted territorial and social strategy. Three different kinds of solidarity are at work: kinship, group, and project solidarity.

#### *Ki`ship solidarity*

In the Kliptown squatter camp, the settlement process has largely been organised along family lines. One third of the squatters who arrived in Kliptown to find a space of their own joined a member of their family. This type of network has long been described as an important access

to city facilities, both in Third World countries and in the West during the Industrial Revolution (e.g. Bairoch, 1985). Let us add that here, that access to kinship relations in a context of an acute housing shortage is particularly important and shows itself in the residents interviews: some came to occupy a shack freed by a family member who found better accommodation elsewhere. Others built their shacks on family land, next to a formal house inhabited by an aunt or cousin. The historic character of the Kliptown neighbourhood, with many long-time residents, enables this type of solidarity. Many newcomers used their family's facilities or social connections in the area.

Other migrations to squatter settlements functioned in the same way, but used religious networks instead of family relations: people settled with the help of members of the same church. For example, members of the Bantu Congregational Church of Zion in South Africa moved inside Khayelitsha, Cape Town, to be closer to their place of worship in Site B. Their new localisation enabled them to enjoy the day-to-day presence and solidarity of other church members: small monetary loans, some help for looking after the children, or visits to bed-ridden members were common (fieldwork, 1997). Religious solidarity can also act by providing information: Eida, member of a Zionist church, left her shack in Dhlamini to settle in Kliptown, following the advice of another church member.

### *Group solidarity*

'Groups' as we define them are less formal categories of people, momentarily sharing a common interest or living through the same difficulties. For instance, homeless people and street children of the Johannesburg CBD share the same and extremely difficult survival conditions.

Group solidarity was an important strategy in the formation of the Newtown squatter settlement. Before their removal by Police forces in 1995, a group of squatters had occupied a piece of land near Braamfontein Railway Station. After their shacks were destroyed, they sought new accommodation. The majority stayed together as a ‘group’ and settled nearby, creating the Newtown Squatter Camp. The collective intra-urban migration allowed each individual to find a minimal shelter. The number (a few dozens) of the former Braamfontein Station squatters was also a deterrent against new eviction and police intervention, easier against individuals. In consequence, the existence of the group had some strategic reasons. Furthermore, the group had an economic *raison d’être*: most of its members were engaged in semi-legal or illegal activities such as trade in taxi spares or *dagga* (wild hemp or marijuana).

Newtown Squatter Camp housed individuals that all shared the same socio-economic profile: they were all destitute and marginalized in and by the urban society. They had no housing, no formal economic activity, and no family. After the December 1996 removal of the camp and the resident’s relocation in Orange Farm, the solidarity between them faltered and the group ceased to exist: the social and economic networks that underpinned the group no longer existed. On an individual basis, most of the former Newtown squatters returned to the city, a strategy to reduce transport costs. The city centre also offered them better prospects for involvement in small or illegal businesses. In 1997 we re-encountered some of the former Newtown squatters in the Power Station squatter camp, where they tried to organise themselves into a new “residents committee” and to further consolidate their situation in the centre of the city. However, the Power Station building was cleared and barricaded in mid-2000.

### *Similar projects*

In Thembalihle, another form of network was prevalent and explained the socio-spatial formation of the settlement. The residents were neither kin, nor linked by group solidarity as described above. They accessed the area with a monetary transaction within a specific housing market. They were also sharing a same residential project.

Whereas squatters are commonly seen as people who build their house themselves, this was not the norm in Thembalihle: 57% of shacks were not built by their residents, but bought. A housing market is thriving in this settlement. Starting at R 400 for the smallest shack, a two-roomed shack is worth around R 2500. The maximum price of R 7500 corresponds to a big shack transformed into a permanent building. The shacks in secondary ownership were bought at an average price of R 2700 (Fieldwork, 1995-1996). This represents a considerable amount of money for squatters, often more than one year's rent for a large sublet room in a formal matchbox house. To buy a second-hand shack is then a substantial project, which requires financial savings and sacrifices. From a background of deprivation in terms of freedom, mobility, land ownership and choice to ask a builder for a “small house” or to buy one, even in an informal settlement with no legal titles, is proof of one’s independence, autonomy, respectability and security. For the people of Thembalihle, their seemingly pathetic shack is the first realisation of an ambitious project in their life, in the city and in society: they are able to live independently and peacefully with their family in their own private space. Succeeding in such a project represents a victory over the past, over their own poverty that led them only to overpopulated townships or to squatter camps under constant threat of eviction.

## **Conclusive remarks: urbanity, *citadinité* and citizenship and the South African urban crisis**

The squatter crisis has continued unabated in the last years and is a key political issue for the South African authorities, at national, provincial and local level. To better understand the real stakes of this crisis, we will use two concepts recently developed by French-speaking geographers: “urbanity” (*urba`ité*) and *citadi`ité*, linking them to the third notion of “citizenship” (*citoye``eté*).

“Urbanity” was defined by Jacques Lévy as the specific trait of cities, what makes a city out of a settlement, or “putting together a maximum of social objects within a minimal distance” (*“mise e` coprésence du maximum d'objets sociaux da`s u`e co`jo`ctio` de dista`ces mi`imales”*, Lévy, 1994:286). Following Max Weber and the Chicago School, Lévy considers that urban space enables and facilitates meeting between people of different backgrounds and origins. Using, as for instance Weber did, the European city as a reference, he shows that it is both a heuristic and normative model. Heuristic, because it is a model where compacity, social heterogeneity, use of public transports, etc. have historically developed. Asian or Arab cities, while having led to fewer literature and theorisation, offer a similar pattern. As such, this model of a European city, with a high level of social and racial mixing (of urbanity), is a tool to understand other cities with a comparative method. Nevertheless, Lévy underlines also that the European city has long been a normative model by planners and urban thinkers: an urban settlement with distinctly non-European characteristics was denied the quality of the city. His highly sophisticated conception of urbanity and the evaluation thereof (Lévy, 1994 and 2000) uses the heuristic model of the European city as a starting point to build a methodology to compare cities around the world: they have varied

level of efficiency in providing meeting places or opportunities for their own inhabitants and it can be evaluated in terms of different levels of urbanity. For instance, highly segregated cities, and South African cities among them, are considered as having a low level of urbanity. The 1997 Urban Development Framework (Republic of South Africa, 1997) implicitly recognised this lack of urbanity when it planned a more integrated, new South African, city. Unfortunately, if the squatter's lot has been improved by housing and service delivery in recent housing schemes such as Devland near Soweto or Delft South in Cape Town (Guillaume, 1999; Oldfield, 1999), they are still located in the periphery of the city: for financial reasons, the newly-developed land are far from the city centres, therefore far from jobs and other opportunities. The squatters' spatial integration into a new, racially and socially integrated city is thus compromised.

The concept of *citadi`ité*, on the other hand, does not describe the characteristics and efficiency of the urban space: it is people-centred and refers to someone's capacity of being an active element in the urban society and environment, in which he/she feels at home. Similar notions have been developed by the Chicago school or Henri Lefebvre (1968), under the notion and/or translation of *urba`ism*, understood, as in Wirth's expression, as a way of life. Elisabeth Dorier-Apprill adds that "the term of *citadi`ité* applies to the city dwellers, their spatial practices and their representations of urban space, their appropriation of urban territories and their cultural values rooted in urban space" ("*Le terme de citadi`ité s'appliquerait plutôt aux habita`ts des villes, à leurs pratiques et repre`s tatio`s des espaces urbai`s, leurs formes d'appropriatio` de ces espaces, leurs a`crages culturels da`s la ville*", Dorier-Apprill, 2001:81). The squatters we met during our fieldwork have been rooted for a long time in the urban environment. Their values and practices are typically urban and they definitely feel at home in the city. Their *citadi`ité* is thus both a fact and a claim: that they

should have a right to the city, Lefebvre's "droit à la ville" (1968), to its equipments, jobs, and opportunities (Gervais-Lambony, 2001:96).

Lastly, "*citadinité*" is etymologically close to "*citoyenneté*" (citizenship), the political, juridical, conscious and active belonging to one's place (e.g. to one's country). The closeness of these two terms has long been recognised as not only linguistic: both "city" (with a high level of urbanity) and "nation" are imagined communities of diverse individuals, sharing space, resources and even values (e.g. Ghorra-Gobin, 1994). Again, the political nature of space comes to light. Well known by the apartheid regime, it was recognised by the RDP when it stated that cities, rebuild in a more compact, central and integrated way, have an important role to play in the birth of the new, democratic nation. The planners reflecting on the squatter crisis and trying to find solutions should be reminded of this fact.

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